

South African election turns nasty

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Recent violence and intimidation during the election campaign is forcing many South Africans to ask whether they really have a functioning democracy.

A worthwhile democracy must have free and fair elections. To ensure South Africa meets these criteria, the Constitution has established the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

Now the IEC has issued a statement saying it is “concerned and dismayed by the signs of disregard for the freedom of association and the right to assemble for political campaigning.”

It followed a weekend when political parties were out drumming up support ahead of this year’s national and provincial elections. It was also a weekend when intolerance and fear of competition drove some members and supporters to disgraceful extremes.

A Bloody Weekend in Nongoma

When Mantobela Ngcobo, an African National Congress (ANC) member, was shot in both legs on Saturday, allegedly by an Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) councilor, a brutal tone was set that continued the next day.

Both the ANC and IFP scheduled rallies in Nongoma on Sunday. Deciding that the venues were too close for comfort, the ANC changed locations, putting several extra kilometers between the parties.

Additionally, hundreds of police were stationed in the area to ensure peace and security. They were later reinforced by riot forces but bloodshed was inevitable.

Police had to use stun grenades to disperse IFP supporters carrying sticks, spears and hatchets. The IFP mob blocked the road to the ANC rally and stopped buses of ANC supporters.

Four people were reported injured during the ruckus. Additionally, the ANC said seven buses were stoned resulting in one person losing teeth.

Despite the violence, the ANC rally went ahead. But the day ended in violence.

Prince Zeblon Zulu, of the Zulu Royal family, his son and his daughter-in-law were shot leaving the rally.

Although this northern area of Zululand is a known IFP stronghold, ANC President Jacob

Zuma expressed disappointment about what happened.

“We hoped that the days of this kind of problem were over,” he said. “No part of the country belongs to a particular party.”

COPE points finger at ANC

In other parts of the country on Sunday, ANC members and supporters were also doing dirty work. According to Pretoria News, three Congress of the People (COPE) members were attacked in East London by people singing ANC songs.

It's reported that some people were “very drunk” and one woman was “severely beaten”.

Guy McClaren, a COPE provincial leader in Mpumalanga, couldn't confirm details of that event but detailed ANC mischief elsewhere.

At a sub-regional launch in Umjindi, McClaren said “a convoy of about 30 vehicles emerged and followed COPE members and leaders around.” He identified these as ANC vehicles by the insignia and huge posters of Jacob Zuma.

Meanwhile, a fellow COPE member notified him that in Acornhoek, ANC supporters and members tried to prevent people from meeting by barricading roads, being verbally aggressive and spreading rumors that the rally was cancelled.

“Violence” is not the best term to describe ANC tactics according to McClaren. “The proper terms are obstruction and intimidation,” he said.

“They [certain ANC supporter and members] give you the feeling like we know who you are and we're going to get you,” McClaren said.

Zuma claims that he has instructed members of his organization to be tolerant and not to disrupt the political activities of others.

“It is sad that the ANC members on the ground are not paying attention to what the ANC leadership are saying in public. I wonder if they are not saying something different behind closed doors,” McClaren wrote on his website.

IEC Intervention

Political analyst Protas Madlala confirmed that “there is a very high level of intolerance” between parties. He agrees that “the feelings exist largely among the leaders. “They are inciting the followers to do all of this,” he said.

Many people in the political world are calling upon the IEC to intervene before the situation spirals too far out of control.

The IEC said, “intervention teams have been identified to be deployed to the various provinces in order to assist with on-site mediation and resolution of disputes.”

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